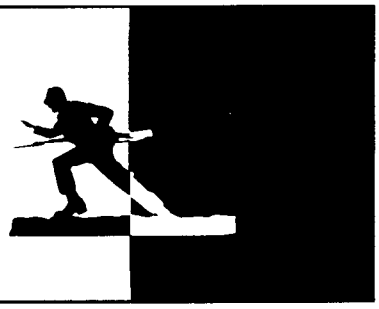
TRAINING NOTES



The M60 Machinegun

Training and Employment

CAPTAIN JEFFREY J. GUDMENS

Airborne, air assault, and light infantry rifle platoons have a great deal of combat power in their organic M60 machineguns, but most of them do not use these weapons to their full potential. Many leaders don't understand how to employ them properly, they don't select the crewmen carefully, and, most important, they don't train the crews properly. As a result, crewmen tend to use the M122 tripod only in the defense, think crew drill is something left over from "the old days," and do not understand the techniques of fire. The remedy is training.

Units need to first train the leaders on the machinegun so they can then train their crews. Leaders must understand the importance of choosing mentally and physically tough soldiers who can accomplish their mission with little guidance. Then they must make sure the crews understand one key point: The M60 machinegun is not just a big M16 rifle; it is the platoon's most important organic support weapon.

M60 crewmen need special training in employing the weapon. While the squad leaders are training their squads, the platoon's senior leaders should train the machinegun crews on their specific tasks.

These leaders and trainers must have a thorough knowledge of Field Manual (FM) 23-67, *Machinegun 7.62-mm, M60*, and develop a machinegun training program. Appendix E of the manual contains an excellent program. All the tasks listed are important, but special emphasis should be placed on teaching the crewmen the following:

The M60 machinegun is not just a big M16 rifle; it is the platoon's most important organic support weapon.

- How to assemble and disassemble the M60 and to perform field repairs when the weapon is not functioning.
- How to mount the machinegun quickly and correctly on the M122 tripod. Crewmen must understand that firing the machinegun from the tripod is the most effective method of engagement, and crew drill is the best way to teach this task.
- How to use the traversing and elevating (T&E) mechanism. Crewmen have to know this task before they can fire effectively during periods of limited visibility, or before they can prepare a range card.
- How to prepare a range card. The gunners should know how to analyze the local terrain and select a good final protective line (FPL) or primary direction of fire (PDF). The crew, working as a team, should walk its sector to clear fields of fire, determine deadspace, and walk the FPL. If the machinegun crews are properly trained, they can advise the platoon's leaders on the weapon's employment.

During movement, the platoon leader must position his crews correctly and have them carry the proper equipment:

- Crew 1 should move with the platoon leader as part of his command post, while Crew 2 moves with the platoon sergeant.
- The gunner should carry the machinegun and 300 rounds of ammunition. The machinegun should be loaded with a "starter belt" containing at least 50 rounds, and the belt should be stored in some kind of protective bag or container.

• To speed the gun's employment, the assistant gunner should carry the tripod in his hands; the tripod should have the pintle assembly mounted and tied off to one of the tripod legs. He should also carry the spare barrel bag and at least 300 rounds.

• The assistant gunner should carry an M9 pistol instead of an M16 rifle. Since his concern is assisting the gunner, all he needs is a self-protection weapon. Carrying an M16 detracts from his ability to mount the machinegun on the tripod.

• The crewmen should carry the ammunition in the issue bandoleer, or in another bag or box. (Linking ammunition together and placing it in a "butt" pack or a demolitions bag works well.) The crew should never carry ammunition exposed or in any manner that allows it to get dirty, broken, or out of sequence in the belt.

When the unit makes contact, the machinegun crews must react in a well-practiced battle drill:

• The platoon leader gives Crew 1 a general location to support by fire. The gunner selects the exact support-by-fire position and immediately delivers suppressive fire using the bipod assembly. The assistant gunner opens the tripod, then opens the barrel bag to remove the T&E mechanism.

• While Crew 1 is going into action using the bipod mount, the platoon sergeant moves forward with Crew 2. The platoon leader gives a general location for this crew to support by fire. The platoon sergeant selects the exact location and commands the crew, "Gun to be mounted here, front, action!"

• The assistant gunner on Crew 2 moves to that location, opens the tripod completely, places it on the ground with the front leg pointed in the direction indicated by the platoon sergeant, and jumps on the rear shoes to plant the tripod firmly.

• The gunner moves forward and places the machinegun on the pintle assembly, while the assistant gunner extracts the T&E mechanism from the barrel bag. The gunner places the T&E on the machinegun and locks it to the traversing bar. He then sights in on a target and begins firing. The assistant gunner ensures that the gun does not run out of ammunition and that the ammunition flows freely into the gun.

The M60 machinegun earned its reputation for reliable firepower in Vietnam; here a machinegunner and his assistant engage a sniper during operations of the 173d Airborne Brigade.

• When Crew 1 hears Crew 2 fire, Crew 1 mounts its machinegun on the tripod using the same method as Crew 2. Effective crew drills ensure rapid suppressive fires.

During offensive operations, machinegun crews can be part of the support element, the breach element, or the assault element.

In the support element, the tripod-mounted M60 delivers accurate, high-volume fire to suppress the enemy. The support element leader must carefully position his machineguns so that each has a sector of fire defined by the amount of traverse the bar allows. The sectors should overlap whenever possible.

Every rifle platoon should be authorized a weapons squad, and every M60 crew should have an ammunition bearer.

In the breach element, the M60 provides excellent close-in support. Its high volume of fire isolates the breach point and allows the breach force to accomplish its mission without worrying about enemy reinforcements. The support force leader of the breach element positions his machineguns on tripods so that their traversing bars prevent the weapons from firing on the breach or assault forces.

In the assault element, the M60s are used to weight the commander's main effort and to suppress critical targets encountered during the assault. Although the crews can fire from the bipod mount, using the tripod mount is more effective. With training, crewmen can use individual movement techniques with the machinegun already on the tripod.

During defensive operations, the M60 should be used to kill the enemy as he closes on the platoon's position, not to engage point targets. The M249 machinegun can usually cover any point target; the M60 is most effective for grazing fire across the platoon front to kill the enemy during his final assault.

In the defense, the platoon leader selects the exact location for his machineguns. His goal is to position them so their combined fires will provide grazing fire (an FPL) across the entire platoon front. This grazing fire is complemented by a tactical obstacle on

the friendly side of the FPL. The best way to obtain grazing fire that covers the platoon front is to place machineguns near the platoon flanks. The platoon leader should place a grenadier on the FPL side of the M60 to cover any deadspace along the line and an M249 on the other side to provide fires to protect the M60. The assistant gunner absolutely *must* walk the FPL while the gunner makes the range card.

One of the major reasons our platoons have not been using their M60s properly is that a change to the tables of organization and equipment (TOEs) removed some important personnel. To correct this deficiency, every rifle platoon should be authorized a weapons squad, and every M60 crew should have an ammunition bearer. (The rifle platoons in Ranger battalions have both weapons squads and ammunition bearers, and their machinegun crews are among the most proficient in the Army.)

During squad training, the weapons squad leader could train the M60 crews on machinegun tasks while the platoon leader and platoon sergeant supervised the platoon's overall training. During field operations, the weapons squad leader could assist the platoon leader with all aspects of machinegun employment, allowing the platoon leader more time for his other tasks.

The greatest advantage to having an ammunition bearer on a machinegun crew would be that the young soldier assigned to the job could train as a crew member and become the next assistant gunner.

To ensure success during the next conflict, our platoons must improve upon their machinegun employment. Achieving this improvement will require several steps:

- Leadership training (Infantry Officer Basic Course, Primary Leadership Development Course, and the like) should include in-depth classes that prepare leaders to train and employ their machinegun crews better.
- The crews should strive to fire off the tripod at every opportunity.
- The crews must understand how to use the T&E mechanism, and crew drill should become second nature to them.

If airborne, air assault, and light infantry rifle platoons learn to employ their M60 machineguns properly, they will realize all of the potential combat power these organic weapons have to offer.

Major Jeffrey J. Gudmens is assigned to Operations Group, Joint Readiness Training Center, where he previously served as a platoon and antitank observer-controller. He commanded an airborne company in the 6th Infantry Division and was assistant G-3 Air, XVIII Airborne Corps, during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, 1990-1991. He is a 1982 ROTC graduate of the University of Dayton.

Known-Distance Marksmanship

The Key to Increasing Combat Performance

CAPTAIN GLENN A. DUBIS
STAFF SERGEANT CARL O. DOOLEY

Since the early 1970s when the Army adopted the M16A1 rifle and the current rifle qualification system, known-distance firing has all but disappeared from Army marksmanship training schedules. Known-distance firing, originally intended as an integral part of the current Army qualification system, was dropped to conserve resources. This is unfortunate, because it has severely limited the soldier's potential to achieve the combat marksmanship skills he needs to attain decisive victory with his primary weapon. In recent years, however, known-distance firing has been making a comeback among infantry trainers and light infantry commanders.

The merits of known-distance firing can be understood best from a historical perspective. Known-distance firing has a long tradition both as a military training tool and as a vehicle for recreational competition. These traditions often muddy thinking with emotion, and long-standing habits stifle creativity and intuition. If we are to revisit known-distance firing, we must briefly review its original purpose, then redefine it by breaking it down into its essential elements.

The Rise and Fall

As a military training tool, known-distance firing was the culmination of marksmanship training. It was, in effect, qualification for the soldier. Its importance was due to two factors:

The first was the development of repeating rifles and cartridges that had